

Playing Favorites: An Exhibition of Staff-Chosen Bonsai

February 26-June 26, 2022

Preview February 19-25

Since the opening of the Clark Bonsai Collection in Shinzen in 2015, we have changed exhibitions every few months to focus on 27 bonsai that illustrate a theme as a means of providing a context for some aspect of the art of bonsai. Some of the past featured themes have been Age, Size, Style, Selected Species, Seasonal Changes, Stylistic Trends, and more. The Playing Favorites Exhibition takes its inspiration from bookstores and libraries that feature staff recommendations of favorite books. In our case, we have offered our volunteers the opportunity to pick one of their favorite bonsai and asked them to explain their reasons for their choice. There will be many diverse responses to the question, "What makes a bonsai 'speak' to you?"

When you visit the bonsai garden, you will find an information card on each pedestal with a picture of the volunteer and his/her reason for choosing the featured bonsai. Why a particular bonsai appeals to someone has about as many reasons as there are people, from the simple aesthetic appeal of the design to its resemblance to some iconic or personally meaningful experience with trees in nature. We have discovered that some are intrigued by the process in which a particular bonsai was created or in the story of the artist that created it. Others are delighted to learn how to "read" the tree's history by interpreting the effect of weather and other environmental factors recorded in its appearance. Many are fascinated by the perception of extreme "age" as it relates to bonsai, marveling at the concept that something so small could be "a thousand years old." Of late, we have seen interest by our visitors in the journey some bonsai in the Clark Collection experienced to wind up as assets in a public bonsai collection. The reasons for gravitating to one bonsai over another are essentially endless and many are meaningful only to the individual involved. For example:



RON YAMABE, Shinzen BOD President and docent, chose the Camphor Peace Tree Forest composed of seedlings collected from a tree that survived the bombing of Hiroshima. He has close family connections to Hiroshima, and he had the opportunity in 2017 to visit the Hiroshima Memorial and Museum. For Ron, the Hiroshima Camphor Peace Tree symbolizes the goal of world peace. He was also

personally involved in acquiring the seedlings and tending them until it was time for them to become a bonsai. Ron (left) was there for every step of the process the day Bob Hilvers (right), CBCS curator, created the forest bonsai.





**HECTOR CABALLERO, Curatorial Team & Docent
Volunteer Coordinator**

I chose this California juniper because it shows how amazing trees are. Even though this tree survived the challenges of ten centuries in the high Mojave Desert, it still keeps thriving and looking beautiful as a Bonsai!



JACK GREEN, Curatorial Team

I first became interested in the pygmy cypress while hiking in its native range along the Northern California coast. They are sometimes called “natural bonsai” because of their aged look and miniature size. I particularly admire this bonsai for its perfect design, which expresses the beauty of art and nature.



JUDITH SWICK, Garden Guardian & Docent

The Sequoia sempervirens is one of my favorites. It supports the truth that “life goes on”! This particular bonsai seems ancient, yet full of life. Here multiple trunks grow from a single source, and it gives one the sense of an old-world forest. It gives me a sense of peace.



PAT SMITH, Curatorial Team & Docent

I love this Bonsai with trees growing out of the lava rock because it is so unusual and beautiful in its design. I admire how the Boxwood trees, rocks, and moss are so harmoniously put together that I see the whole instead of the parts. Mostly it touches a sense of beauty in me, and I look at it with appreciation and a smile.